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A  
C H A R G E,

DELIVERED TO THE

AFRICAN LODGE,

JUNE 24, 1797,

AT MENOTOMY.

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BY THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL  
PRINCE HALL.

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—1797.—









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# C H A R G E.

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*Beloved Brethren of the African Lodge,*

**T**IS now five years since I deliver'd a Charge to you on some parts and points of Masonry. As one branch or superstructure on the foundation ; when I endeavour'd to shew you the duty of a Mason to a Mason, and charity or love to all mankind, as the mark and image of the great God, and the Father of the human race.

I shall now attempt to shew you, that it is our duty to sympathise with our fellow men under their troubles : the families of our brethren who are gone : we hope to the Grand Lodge above, here to return no more. But the cheerfulness that you have ever had to relieve them, and ease their burdens, under their sorrows, will never be forgotten by them ; and in this manner you will never be weary in doing good.

But



But my brethren, although we are to begin here, we must not end here ; for only look around you and you will see and hear of numbers of our fellow men crying out with holy Job, Have pity on me, O my friends, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me. And this is not to be confined to parties or colours ; not to towns or states ; not to a kingdom, but to the kingdoms of the whole earth, over whom Christ the king is head and grand master.

Among these numerous sons and daughters of distress, I shall begin with our friends and brethren ; and first, let us see them dragg'd from their native country, by the iron hand of tyranny and oppression, from their dear friends and connections, with weeping eyes and aching hearts, to a strange land and strange people, whose tender mercies are cruel ; and there to bear the iron yoke of slavery & cruelty till death as a friend shall relieve them. And must not the unhappy condition of these our fellow men draw forth our hearty prayer and wishes for their deliverance from these merchants and traders, whose characters you have in the xviii chap. of the Revelations, 11, 12, & 13 verses,



verses, and who knows but these same sort of traders may in a short time, in the like manner, bewail the loss of the African traffick, to their shame and confusion : and if I mistake not, it now begins to dawn in some of the West-India islands ; which puts me in mind of a nation (that I have somewhere read of) called Ethiopians, that cannot change their skin : But God can and will change their conditions, and their hearts too ; and let Boston and the world know, that He hath no respect of persons ; and that that bulwark of envy, pride, scorn and contempt ; which is so visible to be seen in some and felt, shall fall, to rise no more.

When we hear of the bloody wars which are now in the world, and thousands of our fellow men slain ; fathers and mothers bewailing the loss of their sons ; wives for the loss of their husbands ; towns and cities burnt and destroy'd ; what must be the heart-felt sorrow and distress of these poor and unhappy people ! Though we cannot help them, the distance being so great, yet we may sympathize with them in their troubles, and mingle a tear of sorrow with them, and do as we are exhorted to—weep with those that weep.

Thus



Thus my brethren we see what a chequer'd world we live in. Sometimes happy in having our wives and children like olive-branches about our tables ; receiving the bounties of our great Benefactor. The next year, or month, or week, we may be deprived of some of them, and we go mourning about the streets : so in societies ; we are this day to celebrate this Feast of St. John's, and the next week we might be called upon to attend a funeral of some one here, as we have experienced since our last in this Lodge. So in the common affairs of life we sometimes enjoy health and prosperity ; at another time sickness and adversity, crosses and disappointments.

So in states and kingdoms ; sometimes in tranquility ; then wars and tumults ; rich to day, and poor to-morrow ; which shews that there is not an independent mortal on earth ; but dependent one upon the other, from the king to the beggar.

The great law-giver, Moses, who instructed by his father-in-law, Jethro, an Ethiopian, how to regulate his courts of justice, and what sort of men to choose for the different offices ; hear now my words,  
said



said he, I will give you counsel, and God shall be with you ; be thou for the people to Godward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God, and thou shall teach them ordinances and laws, and shall shew the way wherein they must walk ; and the work that they must do : moreover thou shall provide out of all the people, able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, of hundreds and of tens.

So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father-in-law, and did all that he said.—  
Exodus xviii. 22—24.

This is the first and grandest lecture that Moses ever received from the mouth of man ; for Jethro understood geometry as well as laws, *that* a Mason may plainly see : so a little captive servant maid by whose advice Nomen, the great general of Syria's army was healed of his leprosy ; and by a servant his proud spirit was brought down : 2 Kings, v. 3—14. The feelings of this little captive, for this great man, her captor, was so great, that she forgot her state of captivity, and felt for the distress of her enemy. Would to God (said she to her mistress)



mistress) my lord were with the prophets in Samaria, he should be healed of his leprosy : So after he went to the prophet, his proud host was so haughty that he not only disdain'd the prophet's direction, but derided the good old prophet ; and had it not been for his servant, he would have gone to his grave, with a double leprosy, the outward and the inward, in the heart, which is the worst of leprosy ; a black heart is worse than a white leprosy.

How unlike was this great general's behaviour to that of as grand a character, and as well beloved by his prince as he was ; I mean Obadiah, to a like prophet. See for this 1st Kings, xviii. from 7 to the 16th.

And as Obadiah was in the way, behold Elijah met him, and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art not thou, my Lord, Elijah, and he told him, Yea, go and tell thy Lord, behold Elijah is here : and so on to the 16th verse. Thus we see, that great and good men have, and always will have, a respect for ministers and servants of God. Another instance of this is in Acts viii. 27 to 31, of the European Eunuch, a man of great authority, to Philip, the apostle,



apostle : here is mutual love and friendship between them. This minister of Jesus Christ did not think himself too good to receive the hand, and ride in a chariot with a black man in the face of day ; neither did this great monarch (for so he was) think it beneath him to take a poor servant of the Lord by the hand, and invite him into his carriage, though but with a staff, one coat and no money in his pocket. So our Grand Master, Solomon, was not ashamed to take the Queen of Sheba by the hand, and lead her into his court, at the hour of high twelve, and there converse with her on points of masonry (for if ever there was a female mason in the world she was one) and other curious matters ; and gratified her, by shewing her all his riches and curious pieces of architecture in the temple, and in his house : After some time staying with her, he loaded her with much rich presents : he gave her the right hand of affection and parted in love.

I hope that no one will dare openly (tho' in fact the behaviour of some implies as much) to say, as our Lord said on another occasion. Be- hold a greater than Solomon is here. But yet let them consider that our Grand Master Solomon did not divide the living child, whatever he might do with the dead one, neither did he pretend to make a law to forbid the parties from



from having free intercourse with one another without the fear of censure, or be turned out of the synagogue.

Now my brethren, as we see and experience, that all things here are frail and changeable and nothing here to be depended upon : Let us seek those things which are above, which are sure and steadfast, and unchangeable, and at the same time let us pray to Almighty God, while we remain in the tabernacle, that he would give us the grace of patience and strength to bear up under all our troubles, which at this day God knows we have our share. Patience I say, for were we not possess'd of a great measure of it you could not bear up under the daily insults you meet with in the streets of Boston ; much more on public days of recreation, how are you shamefully abus'd, and that at such a degree, that you may truly be said to carry your lives in your hands ; and the arrows of death are flying about your heads ; helpless old women have their clothes torn off their backs, even to the exposing of their nakedness ; and by whom are these disgraceful and abusive actions committed, not by the men born and bred in Boston, for they are better bred ; but by a mob or horde of shameless, low-lived, envious, spiteful persons, some of them not long since, servants in gentlemen's kitchings, scouring knives, tending horses, and driving chaise.



chaise. 'Twas said by a gentleman who saw that filthy behaviour in the common, that in all the places he had been in, he never saw so cruel behaviour in all his life, and that a slave in the West-Indies, on Sunday or holidays enjoys himself and friends without any molestation. Not only this man, but many in town who hath seen their behaviour to you, and that without any provocations, twenty or thirty cowards fall upon one man, have wonder'd at the patience of the Blacks: 'tis not for want of courage in you, for they know that they dare not face you man for man, but in a mob, which we despise, and had rather suffer wrong than to do wrong, to the disturbance of the community and the disgrace of our reputation: for every good citizen doth honor to the laws of the State where he resides.

My brethren, let us not be cast down under these and many other abuses we at present labour under: for the darkest is before the break of day: My brethren, let us remember what a dark day it was with our African brethren six years ago, in the French West-Indies. Nothing but the snap of the whip was heard from morning to evening; hanging, broken on the wheel, burning, and all manner of tortures inflicted on those unhappy people, for nothing else but to gratify their masters pride, wantonness and cruelty: but blessed be God,  
 scene



the scene is changed ; they now confess that God hath no respect of persons, and therefore receive them as their friends, and treat them as brothers. Thus doth Ethiopia begin to stretch forth her hand, from a sink of slavery to freedom and equality.

Although you are deprived of the means of education ; yet you are not deprived of the means of meditation ; by which I mean thinking, hearing and weighing matters, men and things in your own mind, and making that judgment of them as you think reasonable to satisfy your minds and give an answer to those who may ask you a question. This nature hath furnished you with, without letter learning ; and some have made great progress therein, some of those I have heard repeat psalms and hymns, and a great part of a sermon, only by hearing it read or preached and why not in other things in nature : how many of this class of our brethren that follow the seas ; can foretell a storm some days before it comes ; whether it will be a heavy or light, a long or short one ; foretell a hurricane whether it will be destructive or moderate ; without any other means than observation and consideration.

So in the observation of the heavenly bodies, this same class without a telescope or other apparatus have through a smoak'd glass observed the eclipse of the sun : One being ask'd what  
he



he saw through his smoaked glafs? said, Saw, saw, de clipsey, or de clipleys ;—and what do you think of it?—stop, dere be two ;—right, and what do they look like?—Look like, why if I tell you, they look like two ships sailing one bigger than tother ; so they sail by one another, and make no noile. As simple as the answers are they have a meaning, and shew, that God can out of the mouth of babes and Africans shew forth his glory ; let us then love and adore him as the God who defends us and supports us and will support us under our pressures, let them be ever so heavy and pressing. Let us by the blessing of God, in whatsoever state we are, or may be in, to be content ; for clouds and darkness are about him ; but justice and truth is his habitation ; who hath said, Vengeance is mine and I will repay it, therefore let us kiss the rod and be still, and see the works of the Lord.

Another thing I would warn you against, is the slavish fear of man, which bringest a snare, saith Solomon. This passion of fear, like pride and envy, hath slain its thousands.—What but this makes so many perjure themselves ; for fear of offending them at home they are a little depending on, for some trifles : A man that is under a panic of fear, is affraid to be alone ; you cannot hear of a robbery or house broke open or set on fire, but he hath an accomplice



accomplice with him, who must share the spoil with him ; whereas if he was truly bold, and void of fear, he would keep the whole plunder to himself : so when either of them is detected and not the other, he may be call'd to oath to keep it secret, but through fear, (and that passion is so strong) he will not confess, till the fatal cord is put on his neck ; then death will deliver him from the fear of man, and he will confess the truth when it will not be of any good to himself or the community : nor is this passion of fear only to be found in this class of men, but among the great.

What was the reason that our African kings and princes have plunged themselves and their peaceable kingdoms into bloody wars, to the destroying of towns and kingdoms, but the fear of the report of a great gun or the glittering of arms and swords, which struck these kings near the seaports with such a panic of fear, as not only to destroy the peace and happiness of their inland brethren, but plung'd millions of their fellow countrymen into slavery and cruel bondage.

So in other countries ; see Felix trembling on his throne. How many Emperors and kings have left their kingdoms and best friends, at the sight of a handful of men in arms : how many have we seen that have left their estates and their friends and ran over to the stronger side as they thought :



thought : all through the fear of men ; who is but a worm, and hath no more power to hurt his fellow worm, without the permission of God, than a real worm.

Thus we see my brethren, what a miserable condition it is to be under the slavish fear of men ; it is of such a destructive nature to mankind, that the scriptures every where from Genesis to the Revelations warns us against it ; and even our blessed Saviour himself forbids us from this slavish fear of man, in his sermon on the mount ; and the only way to avoid it is to be in the fear of God : let a man consider the greatness of his power, as the maker and upholder of all things here below, and that in Him we live, and move, and have our being, the giver of the mercies we enjoy here from day to day, and that our lives are in his hands, and that he made the heavens, the sun, moon and stars to move in their various orders ; let us thus view the greatness of God, and then turn our eyes on mortal man, a worm, a shade, a wafer, and see whether he is an object of fear or not ; on the contrary, you will think him in his best estate, to be but vanity, feeble and a dependent mortal, and stands in need of your help, and cannot do without your assistance, in some way or other ; and yet some of these poor mortals will try to make you believe they are Gods, but worship them not. My brethren



thren let us pay all due respect to all whom God hath put in places of honor over us : do justly and be faithful to them that hire you, and treat them with that respect they may deserve ; but worship no man. Worship God, this much is your duty as christians and as masons.

We see then how becoming and necessary it is to have a fellow feeling for our distress'd brethren of the human race, in their troubles, both spiritual and temporal—How refreshing it is to a sick man, to see his sympathising friends around his bed, ready to administer all the relief in their power ; although they can't relieve his bodily pain yet they may ease his mind by good instructions and cheer his heart by their company.

How doth it cheer up the heart of a man when his house is on fire, to see a number of friends coming to his relief ; he is so transported that he almost forgets his loss and his danger, and fills him with love and gratitude ; and their joys and sorrows are mutual.

So a man wreck'd at sea, how must it revive his drooping heart to see a ship bearing down for his relief.

How doth it rejoice the heart of a stranger in a strange land to see the people cheerful and pleasant and are ready to help him.

How



How did it, think you, cheer the heart of those our poor unhappy African brethren, to see a ship commissioned from God, and from a nation that without flattery saith, that all men are free and are brethren ; I say to see them in an instant deliver such a number from their cruel bolts and galling chains, and to be fed like men, and treated like brethren. Where is the man that has the least spark of humanity, that will not rejoice with them ; and bless a righteous God who knows how and when to relieve the oppressed, as we see he did in the deliverance of the captives among the Algerines ; how sudden were they delivered by the sympathising members of the Congress of the United States, who now enjoy the free air of peace and liberty, to their great joy and surprise, to them and their friends. Here we see the hand of God in various ways, bringing about his own glory for the good of mankind, by the mutual help of their fellow men ; which ought to teach us in all our straits, be they what they may, to put our trust in Him, firmly believing, that he is able and will deliver us and defend us against all our enemies ; and that no weapon form'd against us shall prosper ; only let us be steady and uniform in our walks, speech and behaviour ; always doing to all men as we wish and desire they would do to us in the like cases and circumstances.

Live



Live and act as Masons, that you may die as Masons ; let those despisers see, altho' many of us cannot read, yet by our searches and researches into men and things, we have supplied that defect, and if they will let us we shall call ourselves a charter'd lodge, of just and lawful Masons ; be always ready to give an answer to those that ask you a question ; give the right hand of affection and fellowship to whom it justly belongs let their colour and complexion be what it will : let their nation be what it may, for they are your brethren, and it is your indispensable duty so to do ; let them as Masons deny this, and we & the world know what to think of them be they ever so grand : for we know this was Solomon's creed, Solomon's creed did I say, it is the decree of the Almighty, and all Masons have learnt it : tis plain market language and plain and true facts need no apologies.

I shall now conclude with an old poem which I found among some papers :—

Let blind admirers handsome faces praise,  
And graceful features to great honor raise,  
The glories of the red and white express,  
I know no beauty but in holiness ;  
If God of beauty be the uncreate  
Perfect idea, in this lower state,  
The greatest beauties of an human mould  
Who most resemble Him we justly hold ;  
Whom we resemble not in flesh and blood,  
But being pure and holy, just and good :  
May such a beauty fall but to my share,  
For curious shape or face I'll never care.

